

"Writing the truth  
as I see it;  
trying not to  
offend  
those who will  
disagree."

# The truth as I see it™

Idaho Common Sense™



Craig L. Bosley, MD

## Birth control for 11-year-olds

December 3, 2007

The Portland, Maine school board is allowing school personnel to dispense birth control to girls as young as eleven without the knowledge or consent of their parents. Is this reasonable or unacceptable? Would you want your 11-year-old daughter using birth control without your knowledge? Does availability of birth control promote sexual activity in teenagers? Does the school system have the right to get involved in this type of issue or are they interfering with the family?

The United States has higher rates of teenage pregnancy and abortion than other comparable industrialized nations. Approximately 1,000,000 teenagers become pregnant each year with approximately one third of these pregnancies ending with an abortion. The realities of these numbers are difficult to ignore. And the options available to address this are limited.

With nearly a million teenagers getting pregnant each year, the message on abstinence is not working as well as we would like. But shouldn't this be the ideal we seek? In our culture it seems impossible for abstinence education to have any type of meaningful impact. We expose our youth to magazines, television, movies, and music advocating and normalizing everything but abstinence. The only rarity is a monogamous heterosexual married couple. Aren't our youth just imitating what we are modeling for them? If we really want abstinence to work don't we need to make some improvements in our culture for that to happen? Surprisingly, abstinence is given credit for one-fourth of the current decline in the teenage pregnancy rates! Equally surprising to me, several medical studies I read advocated abstinence education. I was impressed because I thought they would primarily discuss birth control and abortion. But these authors felt teenagers were not physically, emotionally, or financially

prepared to make decisions concerning sexual activity leading them to believe abstinence was the best option.

Motherhood, with or without adoption, has always been an option and is the outcome in approximately 50% of these teenage pregnancies. I still remember in grade school occasionally hearing the adults whisper about a classmate's older sister "going away" for about a year because she "got in trouble". Although I could not find any data, I wonder if this option may be exercised less often since abortion has become legal.

With approximately 350,000 teenage abortions per year, legalized abortion has succeeded at its real intended purpose, aborting unwanted pregnancies. But regardless of anyone's personal position on *Roe v Wade*, I think we would all agree abortion is not the best solution to unwanted teenage pregnancies. And if teenagers are not emotionally and physically prepared to make decisions concerning sexual activity how can they be capable of dealing with abortion!

Another option is birth control. But what happens if you make birth control available to teenagers? Won't they just see that as adult endorsement of teenage sexual activity? To the contrary, the medical literature suggests those teenagers who have decided to postpone sexual activity to a more appropriate age are predicted to not change their values just because they now have access to birth control. And those teenagers who are going to engage in sexual activity are not going to abstain if they do not have access to birth control. This makes sense with 1,000,000 unintended teenage pregnancies each year.

As previously stated, CDC data indicates the rate of teenage pregnancies is decreasing. These decreases are attributed to abstinence and birth control with abstinence responsible for

one-fourth of the decrease. It is amazing that in our ultra-liberal society a part of the decrease in teenage pregnancies is due to abstinence! So what do we do? Can we do a better job promoting abstinence? Or should we allow our schools to provide birth control to teenagers without parental consent? Should we allow them to provide it to youth as young as eleven? Does your opinion change knowing the data suggests that for every three pregnancies prevented one abortion is prevented? More importantly, should your opinion change knowing the data suggests that for every three pregnancies prevented one abortion is prevented?

A significant portion of the campaign for legalizing abortion was the belief that substantial numbers of women were dying as a result of illegal abortions. The logic was that we should legalize abortion to prevent these deaths. But is it logical if people are breaking the law and getting hurt to change the law rather than tell people to change their behavior? Did society accept the lesser of two evils? Can't we use the same logic with teenage birth control? With 350,000 teenage abortions a year should we provide birth control to teenagers without parental consent in order to decrease the number of abortions? Is the lesser of two evils a valid argument? Has our society transitioned from right and wrong being absolutes to right and wrong being relative and negotiable?

Dr. Craig Bosley is an emergency physician practicing in Pocatello, Idaho. His column appears in the Idaho State Journal each Monday. If you would like to contact him directly, you can email him at [craig@craigbosley.com](mailto:craig@craigbosley.com) or visit his Website, [www.craigbosley.com](http://www.craigbosley.com) where all of his columns are available.

© copyright, Craig L. Bosley, MD, 2007